

MRS. GEORGE W. BEADLE

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Dear Professor Kornberg,

This is going to be a version of those letters from schoolchildren that say, "Dear Sir, Will you tell me what you did to win a Nobel prize and why it was important, and please write by Friday because my term grade depends on it". In other words, I am presuming on friendship, and am asking you to answer a couple of questions that George, if he had the time, or that I, if I had the ability, could probably find the answer to ourselves, in the professional literature. Here it is:

After you had synthesized DNA, using a primer, you then let the basic mix of raw materials just sit for a while, right? From this, after a lag period, you got a spontaneously-formed DNA, right? What I want to know is: how long was the lag period? Hours, days, weeks? Secondly, was it deliberate--that is, did you keep a watchful eye on it, hoping that you'd get DNA without a primer; or was the outcome a case of serendipity?

The reason I want to know this is that George is directing and I am writing a book on biochemical genetics intended for a reader that we keep calling "the unintelligent layman", although we really mean the uninformed but curious layman. In other words, it is extremely simple, much more so than most other books written for the layman. It differs also in that we attempt to describe the procedures used in some of the great experiments, not just the findings; and, in addition, in that we are trying, by anecdote, to humanize The Scientist. It is for this latter reason that I am curious about the element of luck, if any, in your getting DNA without the use of a primer.

We'd appreciate your writing.

Sincerely,

*Muriel Beadle*